

National Weather Service

New Employee Orientation Program The Buddy Program

The National Weather Service (NWS) has implemented a Buddy Program as part of its New Employee Orientation Program to assist employees in the early months of their employment. The Buddy Program matches new employees with employees who have been with the NWS for some time to assist them in quickly acclimating to their office and the organization.

The Role of the Buddy

A “buddy” is someone who has worked at the NWS for 2 to 3 years and is willing to commit a period of 3 months to help new employees understand the our organizational structure and operations; however, it is possible the buddy-employee relationship may phase out sooner than 3 months. By providing immediate access to operationally necessary information, a buddy accelerates the new employee's ability to deal with early confusing issues and becoming comfortable in the new work place. Questions about “normal protocol” in the organization, getting around the complex, finding the right people to go to for information, correct procedures, and learning what is “right” and “wrong” can easily be answered by a buddy. As a result, managers and supervisors should find that their interaction with new employees is less about low level, operational issues, and more about adding value to the organization.

Buddies will:

1. provide new employees with a point of contact for general inquiries regarding day-to-day matters such as the location of facilities, information processing requirements, and relevant organization policies; and
2. help new employees become comfortable in their new job by familiarizing them with the organizational structure and operations.

Buddies will be provided with a checklist of areas to cover during the new employee's first few days at the NWS office. This checklist can be found by clicking the “Buddy Program” button on the left of the [New Employee Orientation Home Page](#). FMCs are encouraged to personalize the checklist with such information as eating areas, local Toastmasters, using voice mail, and office policies.

The Goals of the Buddy Program

By having a buddy, it is anticipated:

1. The new employee will feel more at home with the NWS in a shorter period of time;

2. Relatively straightforward queries regarding basic operational issues are dealt with in a timely and non-bureaucratic manner;
3. The initial confusion and uncertainty faced by all new employees is lessened;
4. Other orientation activities such as classroom and on-the-job training can be related to actual workplace activities;
5. Our new employees have an opportunity to adjust in a supportive and risk-reduced environment;
6. Manager/supervisor time with new employees is freed up to deal with added value issues;
7. The new employee begins to add value more quickly, leading to increased confidence and self-esteem; and
8. The buddy and new employee are more actively involved in making the NWS a better and more productive place to work.

Selection of a Buddy

Employees are selected by FMC senior management on the basis of two criteria:

- the employee's interpersonal skills, and
- his/her understanding of, and commitment to, the vision and values of the NWS.

It is suggested that, if possible, the selected buddy be a co-worker located in the same office or Division as the new employee.

Responsibilities of a Buddy

Buddies will:

1. Make contact at the earliest available opportunity such as during lunch on the first day at the NWS;
2. Show new employees around the office, introduce them to their colleagues, and direct them to their work site;
3. Explain the operation of any equipment or systems they need to start their jobs;
4. Introduce new employees to the NWS Orientation Home Page;

5. Explain administrative office procedures and introduce them to their timekeepers, administrative, and other staff and procedures;
6. Explain how they can be contacted during the day and will be available to meet on a regular basis. At that time, non-urgent issues can be discussed; and
7. Explain the difference between a buddy, mentor, coach and manager (see below), and then leave the new employee to get on with the new job.

Difference Between a Buddy and a Mentor

A buddy is not a mentor, manager or coach.

1. A **mentoring program** seeks to assist individuals with their development, both personally and professionally;
2. A **buddy program** is solely involved with providing a one-point access to operationally necessary information. In essence, an individual's development is not an expected output.

The role of a buddy must be distinguished from that of a manager or mentor. A mentor is someone, typically more experienced, who is involved with the all-around development of an individual in their organization on a professional and/or personal level.

A buddy is not asked to be the new employee's mentor. The buddy is not responsible for the growth or development of the individual, and it is not part of the role of a buddy to take on such a responsibility. The buddy will not be assessed on his/her success as a buddy by whether or not the new employee develops as an individual during the three-month period. Although the buddy role may involve explaining some simple job-related issues or straightforward procedures, it is not the buddy's job to replace formal training opportunities.

The buddy is not the new employee's manager or supervisor. The buddy will not be held responsible for the new employee's performance. Only the new employee's manager or supervisor can resolve certain issues. Also, questions too detailed or specialized for a buddy to answer should be directed to the new employee's supervisor or manager.

Time Commitments for a Buddy

A buddy should aim to meet regularly for at least 30 minutes, once a week, during the new employee's first month and at least once a month thereafter. Meetings should be used to discuss any non-urgent issues the new employee may have. It is recommended that such regular meetings be held during lunch or in another informal setting.

During the first few days, it may be reasonable to expect as many as 4 or 5 brief queries a day. These should soon taper down to one or two a day. Although all new employees are different,

after 2-3 months, the buddy may hear little or nothing from the new employee on a daily basis. By this time, the new employee may be more accustomed to the environment and the requirements of the job. If the buddy continues to get a large number of 'urgent' queries after the first month, then the Buddy Program is not working, and the buddy should speak to his/her supervisor.

Within the parameters above, it is expected that the buddy and the new employee will meet within working hours. Some buddies and new employees may agree to meet on a social basis, outside working hours. This is an entirely discretionary matter between the buddy and the new employee. It is up to buddies to indicate to the new employees how they feel about being contacted regarding work-related issues outside of working hours.

The buddy relationship between the buddy and the new employee will be terminated when:

- (a) three months expires, or
- (b) either party requests it.

The buddy relationship operates under a "no-fault" termination mechanism. This means if either the buddy or the new employee so requests, the buddy relationship immediately ends. Reasons for termination of the buddy relationship will not be sought or proffered. No discussion will ensue. No blame will be apportioned.

Expectations of the Buddy Relationship

The buddy's relationship with the new employee should be open, positive, and supportive. Discussions between the buddy and the new employee should be confidential. It is not necessary for anyone else to know the details of discussions between the buddy and the new employee, and we are not involved in monitoring buddy relationships. We simply ask the buddy to be supportive of the NWS and co-workers. We discourage gossip and speculation within a buddy relationship, particularly as many new employees are not in a position to form an opinion on most issues during their early months at the NWS.

Review of the Buddy Relationship

After 6 months on the job, new employees will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire aimed at improving the Orientation and Buddy Program. This survey will be available on the Orientation Web page and will not involve the issues discussed between the buddy and the new employee.